



City of San Diego  
Development Services  
**Building Development Review**  
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# Building Newsletter 34-3

## Repair of Existing Fire-Damaged Buildings

Interpretations of State and Local Building Codes  
2002 Municipal Code: Chapter 12, Article 9, Division 2  
Date: April 2003

Page 1 of 2

### I. General

This Building Newsletter will provide guidelines for permitting, inspection and reconstruction of existing buildings and structures which have been completely or partially damaged by fire. Examples of building elements, components or systems are:

1. Structural vertical load-resisting elements: joists, rafters, beams, trusses, posts and walls.
2. Structural lateral load-resisting elements: horizontal roof and floor sheathing, drag struts, shear walls, braced frames, moment-resisting frames and flag-poles.
3. Non-structural elements or systems: suspended ceiling system, non-load bearing partition walls, roofing material, drywall, mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems.
4. Means-of-egress system components: egress windows and doors, corridors, hallways, ramps, stairways, exit illuminations and exit signs.

For the purpose of this building newsletter, existing damaged buildings and structures must have been legally permitted and constructed.

Buildings which have been built illegally in violation of the building code regulations and ordinances effective at the time of construction, are considered to be illegal and therefore must be brought to full compliance in accordance with applicable regulations of the Code.

When the scope of repair work proposed to be performed involves any electrical, plumbing or mechanical system, a separate permit will be required.

Repair work which is limited to painting and decorating, installation of floor covering and cabinet work is exempt from the building permit requirements. However, such work shall comply with applicable Codes.

### II. Applicable Building Code

The question of which building regulations should be applicable for the design and construction of replacement or repair work, current prevailing Code vs. the Code effective at the time of original construction, depends largely on the extent of the damage which the building or structure has suffered. Refer to the following sections in this newsletter to determine which code edition is applicable.

### III. Repetitive Vertical Load-Resisting Elements

When damage to repetitive vertical load-resisting elements such as roof / floor joists and rafters is minor, such elements may be replaced in-kind.

### IV. Individual Vertical Load-Resisting Elements

When individual vertical load-resisting elements such as beams, girders, trusses and posts are damaged, such elements must be replaced by members that are in compliance with the prevailing Codes.

A structural survey of surrounding members must be made to verify and determine the extent of damage.

### V. Lateral Load -Resisting Elements

When damage to the lateral load-resisting elements along line of resistance is minor, such elements may be replaced in-kind.

When damage to the lateral load-resisting elements along line of resistance is extensive, such elements must be replaced with elements that are in compliance with the prevailing Codes.

### VI. Electrical, Plumbing and Mechanical Systems

When components of electrical, plumbing and mechanical systems are damaged, in most cases such components may be replaced with like components in compliance with the adopted Codes and regulations in effect at the time the permit is issued.

Life safety components such as smoke and fire dampers, Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCI), Arc Fault Circuit Interrupters (AFCI) and emergency lighting must be replaced in accordance with the adopted codes and regulations in effect at the time the permit is issued.

### VII. Non-Structural Elements

- A. *Interior non-load bearing partition walls.* When interior non-load bearing partition walls are damaged or when gypsum board of such walls is damaged or removed, they may be replaced in-kind.
- B. *Suspended ceiling system.* Damaged portion of the suspended ceiling system must be replaced in accordance with the requirements of prevailing Codes.
- C. *Cabinets, Countertops, Shelves, Closets, Drawers.* Damaged cabinets, countertops, shelves, closets or drawers must be replaced to comply with the accessibility regulations of the prevailing Codes.
- D. *Fire-Resistive elements.* When fire-resistive elements such as spray-applied fire-resistive materials or fire-resistive walls are damaged or removed, such elements must be replaced in accordance with the requirements of the prevailing Codes.

### VIII. Means of Egress System.

Damage to components of the means-of-egress system

such as egress windows, doors, corridors, hallways, ramps, stairways, exit illuminations and exit signs must be replaced in compliance with the applicable provisions of the prevailing Codes.

#### **IX. Disabled Accessibility Requirements**

Fire damage repair is considered as structural repair and therefore triggers disabled access provisions of the Code including applicable path of travel improvements.

However, fire damage repair to existing privately-funded multi-family residential projects is exempt from disabled access upgrades.

#### **X. Requirements for Plans**

When plans are required per Section 'Procedural Instructions for the Applicant' in this newsletter, they shall clearly identify all damaged areas and specify all damaged elements, components and systems including complete scope of work.

When required by law, plans shall be prepared, stamped and signed by an architect, civil engineer or structural engineer licensed by the State of California.

When there is insufficient evidence that clearly shows what elements or components of the existing building have suffered structural damage, a structural survey, evaluation report and repair proposal shall be submitted. Such report shall clearly identify all damaged areas and specify a list of all damaged elements, components and systems. Such report shall be prepared, stamped and signed by an architect, civil engineer or structural engineer licensed by the State of California.

#### **XI. Procedural Instructions for the Applicant.**

- A. Applicant shall obtain a Miscellaneous Permit, at the Office of Inspection Services. This is to allow for a City building inspector to inspect the fire-damaged building and make a fire-damage assessment.
- B. If the damage is determined to be minor, the applicant will be instructed to obtain a "No-Plan" permit for repair and replacement work. Elements and components may be replaced in accordance with the requirements set forth in this newsletter.
- C. If the damage is determined to be extensive, or if the building inspector is unable to make an assessment of the fire damage, the applicant will be instructed to apply and obtain the appropriate building, electrical, plumbing or mechanical permit. Plans, specifications, repair proposal, engineering survey and evaluation and structural calculations shall then be submitted. Refer to Section 'Requirements for Plans' in this newsletter.
- D. After permits are issued, the applicant shall call and schedule for inspection of work in progress as required by the Code.

#### **XII. Other Information**

The Inspection Services Division is located at 9601 Ridgehaven Court, Suite 220, San Diego, CA 92123 and the telephone number is 858-492-5070. The automated inspection request line is 858-581-7111.

All Building Newsletters and other related information are available on the City of San Diego web site at [www.sandiego.gov](http://www.sandiego.gov).

For questions regarding this newsletter or questions related to this subject matter, please contact the Development Services Department, Building Development Review at (619) 446- 5400.